

# Productivity

## ORNAMENT AND CRIME

### *Bas van Beeks' new series*

In 'Ornament and Crime' (1908), Adolf Loos distanced himself from the ornament. According to Loos, the most primitive societies used ornament, while the most advanced ones did not, or at least they tried to dismiss ornamentation as something without a useful purpose. Indeed, ornament makes objects obsolete sooner, catering to the needs of our consumption society by defining a 'trend', which then reduces the item's value by half some six months later. We see this same split between the dominant, process-oriented methodology of Wim Crouwel and the more frivolous (and even kitsch) approach of Jan van Toorn. The new pragmatism became the new ugliness. In the relay race called design, the baton is continually being handed to the camp that represents the new truth of modernity.

The way in which this has been propagated in product design over the past 15 years is immensely intriguing. The product embodies all the characteristics of a décor, the representation of a product, of 'noise', except that it now appears with a 'skin'. The noise is wrapped in a layer of lacquer made of pure aesthetics. We could call it a hybrid, a denial of industrial progress and at the same time an ode to modernity. Both camps are represented and both serve the market. Result: the designer wants the old craft back, the industry cannot/will not give it, and so new sweatshops spring up in India and the Netherlands, filled with underpaid workers or apprentices. What we are dealing with here is competition falsification. Designers appear not to be able to have their elaborate prototypes manufactured by the industry, which they then surpass, ending up in the position of artisan. Manufacturing a prototype is not design, but the (mass) reproduction of it.



A more effective way to visualise an identity is with an icon; the divine image of our earthly existence is also for sale now. Because designers want to maintain control of this, they seem to interpret it in the same unilateral way, in surprisingly many cases. The hybrid deteriorates into the icon by means of graphic reduction. A black-and-white visualisation of a 3D object must capture the iconographic qualities of the subject. Its visibility and reproducibility (in printed media) depends entirely on the success of the reduction. So why not adjust your design process to accommodate this by designing on that basis? An added advantage is that this reduction suggests pure design, because no noise can be discerned; any product flaws are eliminated. A product is like the stage set of an opera; after the encore, the lights are turned on and it's time to leave. The illusion cannot be maintained; the performance is over.

The question arises as to how the original design relates to a reinterpretation-reproduction made by artisans in Turkey and China? Iconic designs (and attempts at such) over the last 15 years have undergone this very treatment. The role of designer is extended to that of manager. Who designed the Senseo? Not the design company, but the top managers at Philips and Douwe Egberts. We are therefore speaking of another type of control at the foundation of the design process. The first decision is completely up to the craft industry that has been refining its production technique for hundreds of years, along with the resulting aesthetics. Aesthetic control by the designer is entirely imparted to that of the (re-Romanticised) artisan. The objective is to undermine the performance of the present-day tinkering craftsman and simultaneously re-industrialise it.

The outcomes can be interesting indeed; during the production process, many artisans have introduced design improvements. For example, the Koffiepot by Ineke Hans has a badly fitting lid. The Armenian man in Çiğane (Istanbul) made a lid that fits the coffee pot perfectly.

[www.basvanbeek.com](http://www.basvanbeek.com)

1. Tom Dixon lamp
2. Eamsie
3. Ineke Hans
4. Jasper Morisson teapot
5. Jasper Morisson teapot
6. Tom Dixon
7. George Nelson
8. Jasper Morisson
9. Karim
10. Jamie Hayon
11. V&D lamp
12. Tom Dixon lamp